

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 01731 01 OF 02 281051Z
ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-11 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 OMB-01 AID-05 TRSE-00 EB-08
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P 280815Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9795
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USMISSION USUN NY
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 1731

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MR
SUBJ: UNEASE IN MAURITANIA

1. SUMMARY: DURING PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, MAURITANIAN
REGIME APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN PASSING THROUGH A SORT OF
POLITICAL CRISIS. IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF TENSION HAS BEEN
RENEWED EFFORT TO FORCE HIGH OFFICIALS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
PUBLIC OFFICE AND PRIVATE BUSINESS CONCERNS. AT THE SAME
TIME A LARGER "PROGRESSIVE-MODERATE" CLASH MAY ALSO BE
UNDERWAY, AND THE FUTURE OF SOME IMPORTANT REGIME CON-
SERVATIVES HAS BEEN CALLED INTO QUESTION. AT PRESENT,
PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH SEEMS TO HAVE STOLEN MARCH ON
"PROGRESSIVES" WITH CALL FOR USE OF TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC
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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 01731 01 OF 02 281051Z

JURISPRUDENCE IN MAURITANIAN COURTS. ALSO ANNOUNCE-
MENT OF LONG-AWAITED SAUDI LOAN MAY HAVE HELPED TO
BOLSTER CONFIDENCE IN REGIME. NEVERTHELESS, THIS
GOVERNMENT REMAINS IN STATE OF NEAR BANKRUPTCY, IS
NOT WINNING ITS WAR IN THE SAHARA, AND IS PLAGUED WITH
A HIGH LEVEL OF CORRUPTION. IN THIS SITUATION, OPPO-
SITION TO THE OULD DADDAH REGIME, SO FAR WEAK AND

DISUNITED, COULD GAIN STRENGTH. END SUMMARY.

2. IT APPEARS THAT DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN SOME SORT OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE UNDERWAY WITHIN GHT MAURITANIAN REGIME. SOME ASPECTS OF THIS TENSION HAVE BEEN APPARENT TO THE CASUAL OBSERVER, BUT THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A GOOD DEAL OF BEHIND-THE-SCENES MANEUVERING. WHILE THE STRUGGLE MAY NOT YET BE OVER, IT APPEARS FOR THE MOMENT TO HAVE REACHED A STANDOFF, AND THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO TRY TO ASSESS WHAT HAS HAPPENED AND THE LIKELY FUTURE COURSE OF EVENTS.

3. FIRST INDICATION THAT SOMETHING WAS AFOOT WAS REMOVAL ON MAY 30 OF FINANCE MINISTER BA IBRAHIMA AND HIS REPLACEMENT BY MAURITANIAN CENTRAL BANK DIRECTOR AHMED OULD DADDAH. BA'S SIN WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN OWNERSHIP OF STOCKS IN PRIVATE COMPANY. RUMOR MILL'S "REAL" REASONS FOR HIS DEMISE RANGE FROM MOOR-BLACK CONFRONTATION (BA'S DISMISSAL OF HIGH MOORISH OFFICER IN FINANCE MINISTRY SIX MONTHS AGO IS SAID TO HAVE OUTRAGED MOORS) TO PERSONALITY CLASH WITH PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH.

4. SHORTLY AFTER BA'S REMOVAL, REGIME BROUGHT AN ANTI-CONFLICT OF INTEREST CAMPAIGN INTO PUBLIC VIEW. ON JUNE 7 PRESIDENT GAVE PRESS INTERVIEW REITERATING HIS VIEW
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 NOUAKC 01731 01 OF 02 281051Z

THAT HIGH CIVIL SERVANTS COULD NOT ENGAGE IN PRIVATE BUSINESS. NATIONAL POLITICAL BUREAU (BPN) OF MAURITANIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY ECHOED THIS STAND IN A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED JUNE 13 FOLLOWING TWO DAYS OF MEETINGS. PRESIDENT'S WIFE, MARIEM, IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN A MOVING FORCE BEHIND CAMPAIGN WHICH IS BELIEVED TO HAVE COST SOME TWENTY MIDDLE AND HIGH LEVEL FUNCTIONARIES THEIR JOBS.

5. FOREGOING DEVELOPMENTS ARE WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE STEMMED FROM EFFORT BY "PROGRESSIVE" ELEMENTS WITHIN REGIME TO STRIKE A BLOW AT "MODERATES" WHO HAVE COME TO HOLD UPPER HAND IN GOVERNMENT. DURING ITS RECENT MEETING, BPN IS SAID TO HAVE SET UP COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO CORRUPT PRACTICES HEADED BY FISHERIES MINISTER ISMAEL, A FORMER MEMBER OF KADHINE OPPOSITION AND AVOWED LEFTIST. COMMISSION REPORTED TO HAVE 120 CASES OF ALLEGED MALFEASANCE ON ITS AGENDA. ALSO, HIGH YOUTH COUNCIL, WHOSE PRESIDENT, TIDJANI OULD KERIM, IS FORMER MEMBER OF KADHINE, ADDRESSED A COMMUNICATION TO BPN MEETING PRAISING ANTI-CONFLICT OF INTEREST DRIVE AND CALLING FOR RETURN TO SOCIALIST PURITY. APART FROM OFFICIALS ALREADY REMOVED, TARGETS OF "PROGRESSIVES" ARE SAID TO BE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, CONSTRUCTION, INTERIOR AND PLAN. FIRST TWO, OULD MOUKNASS AND SALAH, ARE AMONG PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH'S CLOSE CONFIDANTS.

6. NEXT POLITICAL EVENT WAS REGIME'S HEAVY STRESS ON BPN'S JUNE 13 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HENCEFORTH ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE (SHARI'A) WOULD BE BASIS OF MAURITANIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND THAT COMMISSION UNDER PARTY AFFAIRS MINISTER OULD BOYE HAD BEEN FORMED TO STUDY HOW NECESSARY CHANGES WOULD BE MADE. EXACTLY HOW TRANSFORMATION IS TO COME ABOUT HAS YET TO BE REVEALED. MANY BELIEVE IT NEVER WILL. NEVERTHELESS, DECISION WAS FOLLOWED BY SERIES OF WELL ORGANIZED AND CLOSELY GUARDED DEMONSTRATIONS OF SUPPORT AROUND COUNTRY AND BY APPROVING MESSAGES FROM VARIOUS ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS.

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 01731 02 OF 02 281048Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NOUAKCHOTT 1731

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

7. POLITICALLY INTERESTED PEOPLE IN NOUAKCHOTT GENERALLY SEE ISLAMIC REVIVAL AS ATTEMPT BY CONSERVATIVES IN REGIME TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM "PROGRESSIVE"-INSPIRED PURGE, AND, INDEED, CONFLICT OF INTEREST CAMPAIGN HAS FADED FROM VIEW, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. PRESS HAS NOT MENTIONED SUBJECT FOR TWO WEEKS.FURTHER, HIGH YOUTH COUNCIL, WHOSE COMMITMENT TO ISLAMIC ORTHODOXY BELIEVED LESS THAN TOTAL, WENT ON RECORD OVER NEARLY HALF PAGE IN OFFICIAL DAILIES IN SUPPORT OF SHARI'A DECISION. THIS OUTPOURING ADDS WEIGHT TO VIEW THAT SHARI'A ANNOUNCEMENT HAS TAKEN WIND

OUT OF "PROGRESSIVES" SAILS.

8. COMMENT: AT THIS WRITING, REGIME'S POLITICAL STOCK SEEMS TO HAVE RISEN SLIGHTLY ABOVE MID-JUNE LOW. SHARI'A ANNOUNCEMENT MAY HAVE PERMITTED CONSERVATIVES TO STEAL MARCH
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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 01731 02 OF 02 281048Z

ON "PROGRESSIVES" AND THEIR CONFLICT OF INTEREST PURGE. ALSO, JUNE 25 ANNOUNCEMENT OF \$29 MILLION SAUDI LOAN TO GIRM MUST BE WELCOME NEWS TO OULD DADDAH REGIME. SAUDIS HAD APPARENTLY STOPPED EXTENDING CREDITS TO MAURITANIA IN 1978, AND RUMOR WAS THAT RIYADH WAS CONCERNED AT POOR STATUS OF MAURITANIAN FINANCES.

9. THESE SHORT TERM SUCCESSES, HOWEVER, CANNOT DISGUISE GRAVE DIFFICULTIES WHICH CONFRONT THIS GOVERNMENT. FIRST, GIRM COFFERS APPEAR NEARLY EMPTY. GOVERNMENT CONSTRUCTION AND HIRING OF NEW EMPLOYEES HAS BEEN DRASTICALLY CURTAILED, MINISTRIES HAVE IN SOME CASES NOT PAID BILLS, AND PROVISION OF EVEN MOST MUNDANE SERVICES HAS BECOME A PROBLEM. LATEST INDICATION OF INSOLVENCY IS VIRTUAL DISAPPEARANCE OF MEDICINES FROM MEDICAL CENTERS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. GIRM HAS ADDRESSED URGENT REQUEST TO FRENCH EMBASSY FOR SUPPLY OF WIDE RANGE OF MOST BASIC MEDICAL SUPPLIES. FURTHER, GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPT TO SHORE UP NOUAKCHOTT'S SAGGING ELECTRICAL SUPPLY SYSTEM SAID TO HAVE STALLED LAST WEEK BECAUSE SENEGALESE CONCERN HAD NOT BEEN PAID FOR REPAIR OF A GENERATOR. IS SHORT, EVEN NICKELS AND DIMES NEEDED TO MAKE THIS ECONOMY WORK APPEAR TO BE LACKING.

10. SECOND MAJOR CONCERN IS SAHARA WAR. SITUATION IS STALEMATED BOTH DIPLOMATICALLY AND POLITICALLY, BUT POLISARIO REMAINS CAPABLE OF STRIKING BLOWS AND LETTING WORLD KNOW ABOUT IT. LATEST EXAMPLES ON MAURITANIAN "FRONT" WERE BLOODING OF MAURITANIAN ARMY'S NOSE DURING COMBINED MORROCCAN MAURITANIAN OPERATION AGAINST GUERRILLAS IN OUM DREIGA REGION AND JUNE 16 SABOTAGE OF IRON ORE TRAIN. WAR IS EXPENSIVE TO THIS IMPOVERISHED GOVERNMENT, AND, ALTHOUGH USUALLY FAR REMOVED FROM MOST POPULATION CENTERS, FIGHTING IS VERY MUCH ON MIND OF GENERAL PUBLIC.

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PAGE 03 NOUAKC 01731 02 OF 02 281048Z

1.. LASTLY, APPARENTLY PERVERSIVE CORRUPTION THROUGHOUT GOVERNMENT IS POLITICAL LIABILITY TO REGIME. ARMY REPORTEDLY REFUSED TO PERMIT ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION TO LOOK INTO ALLEGED WRONGDOING WITHIN MILITARY, AND STORIES OF HANKY-PANKY IN DEFENSE

MINISTRY ARE LEGION. CORRUPTION IS WELL ESTABLISHED FACT OF LIFE IN THIS COUNTRY, AND IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW BPN'S INVESTIGATION COULD PROCEED WITHOUT ALIENATING KEY ELEMENTS OF MAURITANIAN ESTABLISHMENT. NEVERTHELESS, CORRUPT PRACTICES ARE DEBILITATING TO WAR AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND PROVIDE OPPOSITION TO PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH WITH CONVENIENT WEAPON TO USE AGAINST HIM.

12. IN SHORT, CURRENT SITUATION IN MAURITANIA CAN BE EXPLOITED BY OPPOSITION TO REGIME. AT PRESENT, THIS OPPOSITION IS WEAK AND DISUNITED AND SURFACES ONLY OCCASIONALLY IN A FEW TRACTS WITH VERY LIMITED DISTRIBUTION. STILL, AS LONG AS COUNTRY'S DIFFICULTIES CONTINUE, AND IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT THEY WILL, PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH WILL NEED ALL HIS POLITICAL SKILL TO KEEP HIS OPPONENTS FROM GAINING STRENGTH. DUNBAR

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